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# ***How Useful is Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony and Domination to the Study of African States?***

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## ***Abstract***

*Having investigated the relevance of the operative assumptions of Gramsci's theory of hegemony and domination to African realities, the paper proposes that scholars attempt to devise and articulate a more appropriate theory and methodology. It also proposes that the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods be examined as they relate to the theory of hegemony and domination in Africa, in an integrated form, especially in the interest of studying long-term social change.*

## ***Introduction***

The Italian social theorist, Antonio Gramsci, is now being recognized as the greatest Marxist thinker since Karl Marx. Whereas Marx produced volumes, Gramsci did not publish a single book. In the 1930s, when he was languishing in prison, he put down his ideas in a rather elliptical and allusive style. Such ideas were compiled and published under the title, *Prison Notebooks*. Nevertheless, the ideas that appear in the book, centered on his notion of "hegemony" and "domination" are gaining considerable sympathy among the social theorists and historians. His recognition of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, for instance, has influenced the center-periphery-dependency debates that have characterized many of the writings of Gunder Frank, Emmanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, and others. His theory of hegemony and domination has also been widely recognized as a necessary complement to Marxism.

This paper will review the existing literature in which Gramsci's ideas have been used as tools of social inquiry, and then investigate if pre-industrial African societies do fit his paradigm. As the reader will shortly see, the literature on Africa is very limited. Three dominant themes spotlight the scholarly debates on African studies. First, there are scholars such as Robert Fatton, who confine themselves

to study hegemony and domination in the context of post colonial Africa. Second, there are those historians, such as Roland Robinson, who have devised a theory, in this case collaboration, to investigate the dimensions of hegemony and domination, but who limit themselves to the colonial era. Third, there are those historians, including David Laitin and David Robinson, who insist that both periods be studied in an integrated form as a coherent whole. As is to be expected, the debate among the three approaches appears to be a "form of shadow boxing," which has every potential of being fully blown up. In writing this paper, I have the following objectives: First, to investigate the relevance of the operative assumptions of Gramsci's theories to African realities, and then to propose that there be an attempt to devise and articulate a more appropriate theory and methodology. Second, to reinforce that both historical periods be considered in an integrated form in the interest of studying long-term social change in Africa.

### *Gramsci's Theory of Domination and Hegemony: An Overview*

In common parlance, the word "domination" denotes subjugation, or the exercise of absolute control either by a state or by an individual. On the other hand, "hegemony" conveys such notions as influence, patronage, or leadership. The Italian social theorist, Antonio Gramsci,<sup>1</sup> uses the two terms to analyze the structure of the European bourgeois state of his time. For him, the cohesion of such a state springs from the spiritual and cultural supremacy it exercises through the manipulation of "civil society."<sup>2</sup> By using agents of socialization such as the church, family, schools, the media, and other non-governmental institutions, the state foists its own values and beliefs on society, thereby providing a cultural direction. Its hegemony in this sense becomes rule by consent. It parallels the supremacy of force, but diminishes the need for its application.

In contrast, domination is supremacy established by force and maintained by the state through military, political, judicial and fiscal systems. In this case, domination is an anti-thesis<sup>3</sup> of hegemony. The of hegemony of the state rests in part on ultimate coercive power, but the currency of force is devalued if it must be constantly applied. A state seeks rule by consent, and strives to secure habitual acquiescence to its authority. This makes legitimacy a requisite for the state.

Since Gramsci uses the two concepts in the context of revolutionary Marxism, it may be necessary to make a slight digression here and provide some link between Gramsci and Marx. Marx expounded his ideas of revolution primarily for the industrially advanced countries of the time—namely, Britain,

France and Germany. In fact, one could even say that his theory of revolution has relevance only to modernizing capitalism, which sweeps away the pre-capitalist modes of production, and makes the proletariat the dominant class in society. The peasantry, which he contemptuously dismissed as "rural idiocy," does not even come into the revolutionary ethos.

For the purpose of this paper, therefore, it is important to mention first, even if briefly, what Marx calls the "base" and the "superstructure." It would also be useful to note that while Marx had clear and strong ideas about "domination," he had little to say regarding "hegemony." The latter has been conceived, articulated, and developed as a theory by Antonio Gramsci.

According to Marx, the "base" of the social order consists of the relations between classes, which determines their various powers of control over the means of production, distribution, and exchange. It determines the actual place people occupy in society. Those who control the base constitute a ruling class and therefore exercise domination over society.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the "superstructure" that rests upon the base encompasses all socializing mechanisms such as language, religion, education, law, ideology, mass media, trade unions, the army, and the security apparatus. These mechanisms express, enforce and consolidate the relations of economic power pertaining to the base.<sup>5</sup>

Marx contends that various legal, political and cultural institutions are established in order to spread the values, beliefs and vested interests of the ruling class, and, therefore, such institutions maintain the status quo. For him, fundamental revolutionary change occurs in society only with the change in the base, that is, with the transfer of ownership of the means of production. Administrative, legal and political changes that take place in the superstructure are superficial. They do not address the fundamental question of state power which is based on the economy. Revolution, Marx maintained, would be possible only when the productive forces—the workers—develop to the level at which existing productive relations can no longer contain them or impede their further growth, thus making a proletarian revolution inevitable. Marx concludes by pointing out that in the ensuing crisis, all oppressive institutions crumble and human liberation made possible in a state of pure communism.

Gramsci's views on domination are not at variance with that of Karl Marx. Where he disagrees with him, and where Marx seems to have failed, is to see the role of hegemony in all this. Gramsci does not subscribe to the notion of human liberation as merely an inevitable consequence of the internal dynamics of capitalism. Unlike Marx, he saw the complex and concealed modes of class domination, which manifests itself in what he calls hegemony. By using his theory of hegemony, Gramsci

therefore attempts to explain why the base will not just crumble, and even if it does, revolution will not simply and necessarily occur. Indeed, despite the fact that millions of industrial workers become unemployed in the industrially advanced countries of the West during the Great Depression of early 1930s, there were no revolutions of the type that Marx had envisaged. If anything, Hitler and Mussolini came to power. In this respect, Gramsci argues that the power of the ruling class is not just limited to the economic base. It also manifests itself in the hegemony exercised from the superstructure, that is, from the spiritual, ideological and cultural spheres that provide myth, consolidation and legitimacy to a given regime. He contends that the values, beliefs, consumption patterns, and habits and modes of thought of the ruling class do penetrate the proletariat. They rub-off on the population, distort their vision and negatively affect their perception. As a result, Gramsci argues that the task of human liberation cannot simply be considered inevitable, just because there is a crisis in the system. The population can be easily manipulated. The lack of critical consciousness cannot be lightly viewed. Under such circumstances, people can hardly be expected to question their conditions, or to reject the values of the ruling class. And no matter how abject their living conditions, they will not think of revolution. If fundamental change is therefore to take place in society, Gramsci maintains that revolutionary seeds would have to be planted in a cultural soil that is prepared to accept them. The hegemony of the ruling class, i.e., the spiritual and cultural supremacy that it exercises by manipulating civil society, would have to be countered.

To that end, Gramsci argues that more attention should be given to revolutionary organization in the realm of culture and education. Factory discussion councils should be established to enhance the consciousness<sup>6</sup> of the workers to help promote their solidarity, to restrict the decision-making capacity of the owners, and eventually to take over the administrative functions of the factories. In his own words, "men, when they come to feel their strength and to be conscious of their responsibility and their value, will no longer suffer another man to impose his will on them, and claim the right to control their actions and thoughts."<sup>7</sup>

In this respect, Gramsci's sociology of knowledge becomes a form of critical consciousness. Its validity resides in its ideological function of intellectually organizing the experiences of the masses. Thus, ideologies cease to be viewed as intellectual processes mystifying social reality as in Marx, and acquire true historical, psychological and sociological value.<sup>8</sup> Viewed in retrospect, Marx's prophecy of a proletarian revolution in the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe, and still less, in Italy, has not been fulfilled. Indeed, in Gramsci's Italy of the 1920s for instance, despite rampant inflation, mass unemployment and industrial unrest, "history's chosen class, the 'proletariat,' did not promote revolutionary uprising. If

anything, it came to terms with the system. Besides, who is to determine that the workers have an interest in revolution that goes beyond better wages and improved working conditions? In this regard, it should be noted that the general pattern of peasant resistance to hegemonic thought and institutions, and the fact that it is the peasantry, rather than the proletariat, that has provided the major social base for successful revolutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has become a paradox of Marxist theory. One has to study the history of such countries as Russia, China, and Vietnam.

Unlike Marx, to his credit, Gramsci did rightly recognize the revolutionary potential of peasantry. But in so far the passivity of the proletariat is concerned, he contends that this was made possible because the fundamental question of hegemony was not properly addressed. He therefore challenges Marxists to end their obsession with the economic base and to pay more attention to the superstructure and to promote intellectual debate to enhance consciousness.

Gramsci also claims that in less developed societies, where the level of consciousness is low and where people are ruled by coercion, fear and apathy, a voluntaristic coup d'état of the Russian type may be appropriate. But in culturally advanced west, where the workers willingly consent to existing arrangements, revolution presupposes a transformation of mass consciousness, and that it can be done through a protracted battle of "war of positions,"<sup>9</sup> a war where intellectuals play a significant role. Here, too, one should note that there is no compelling evidence to prove that the consciousness of the lower strata of society is low, or at what level of consciousness the intellectuals function, or whether or not, the consciousness of the intellectuals is in the interest of the lower strata.

Ideas build societies. Ideas move nations from one stage of development into another. When people are exposed to ideas, they become conscious. In effect, the battle field for Gramsci is the struggle of ideas. He maintains that revolution is about people. Its primary objective is to change society for the better. But change is the result of the stimulus evoked by the friction of one group of ideas upon another. Thus, when members of the same group maintain different ideas with regard to the same subject in opposition, they necessarily evoke comparison, debate and discussion, thus enhancing consciousness. It is in this light that one should study Gramsci's theory of domination, hegemony, consciousness and revolution.



## *Gramsci's Theory in the Works of Selected Africanist Scholars:*

Anthropologists, economic historians, and social theorists have produced a considerable body of literature that is based on Gramsci's ideas. Yet the literature concerning Africa is very limited. So too is the dimension of the debate regarding the use of his paradigms as tools for studying the African society. In fact, one could even say that it has barely begun. Joseph Femia<sup>10</sup> examines Gramsci's political theory and the role of consciousness within the framework of historical materialism and its relationship to orthodox Marxism, with specific reference to Italy from 1914 to 1937. The study includes Gramsci's political conception of hegemony as an explanation of bourgeois dominance in the social order. Thomas Bates<sup>11</sup> reviews Gramsci's theory of hegemony and explains its implications for the strategy of revolution. Leonardo Salamini<sup>12</sup> analyzes Gramsci's theory of the primacy of superstructural over infrastructural activities, of ideological over political hegemony, and the subjective over the objective dimensions in Marxist theory of society.

James Scott<sup>13</sup> relates Gramsci's theories to the general pattern of peasant resistance to hegemony and domination and explains why the peasantry, rather than the proletariat, has provided the major social base for successful revolutions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Walter Adamson<sup>14</sup> provides a study of Gramsci's political and cultural theory and strives to validate its application in association with the historical period, 1919-1936. In the process, he criticizes Gramsci for not being able to explain further, or to see anything between consent and coercion. But the world happens to be more complex than that.

Richard Sklar<sup>15</sup> discusses aspects of class formation, consolidation, identification and action in Africa since independence. He tests the validity of a Marxist conception of class based solely on the controlling impact of the means of production, and the notion of the subordination of African ruling classes to foreign capitalist interests. Sklar concludes that class relations in Africa are determined by relations of power not production, and that their formation, identification and action are determined by a coming together of holders of different functions including high-status occupation, high income, superior education and a specific measure of power, notably the ability to control the means of consumption and compulsion.

Abu Boahen<sup>16</sup> reviews the history of Africa from 1880 to 1935 and discusses Africa's fate under colonial domination. Pearl-Alice Marsh<sup>17</sup> investigates how, facing massive African labour unrest, Pieter Botha retreated to state violence to assure foreign and domestic capital, that he had the solutions to industrial problems, and that his solutions were not contradictory to the basic goals of apartheid.

Bruce Berman<sup>18</sup> examines the colonial state in Africa, investigates the

different methods utilized by the French and the British, and how the colonial state was used as an agency of political domination in which the indigenous social forces were used as a means of establishing hegemony and domination. Donald Cruise O'Brien<sup>19</sup> looks at how a dominant French culture and modes of political and economic organization were forcefully imposed upon and agglomerated of subordinated societies contained within arbitrarily drawn boundaries called Senegal. On the other hand, Roland Robinson<sup>20</sup> sketches a theory of collaboration to explain the success of European powers in extending informal and formal control over much of Asia and Africa, how the agents of foreign domination bargained effectively, modified the impact of European rule and ushered in, and the process of decolonization. In his opinion, any new theory in this respect must find room for analysis of the most important mechanism of European management of the non-European world: the use of local collaborating groups—whether these are ruling elites or land lords, or merchants, as mediators between Europe and the indigenous political and economic system.

Gabriel R. Warburg<sup>21</sup> takes Robinson to task. He studied British rule in the Nile Valley from 1882 to 1956. He tests Robinson's theory of collaboration and concludes that although the theory suffers from certain inaccuracies and generalizations, he says, one can state with certainty, that the Sudan could not have been ruled by a handful of British officials, backed by a symbolic British military presence, without the voluntary collaboration of large segments of the Sudanese populace and its elite.

David Laitin defines hegemony<sup>22</sup> as political forging—whether through coercion or elite bargaining—and institutionalization of a pattern of group activity in state, and the concurrent idealization of that scheme into a dominant symbolic framework that reigns as common sense. Having done that, he looks at social systems theory which postulates that a change in a given sub-system within a social system responds to changes in other systems, which results in equilibrium or congruence.

Laitin relates both theories to Yorubaland in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and how British imperial control and political cleavage were established there. Despite the fact that both Islam and Christianity co-existed in Yorubaland, the British chose ancestral city worship (politics) which functioned as a dominant symbolic framework as a means of establishing hegemony through coercion, elite bargaining, or co-optation.

Having concluded that mutual adjustment of values among sub-systems as unlikely, Laitin maintains that one must prevail and become hegemonic, setting standards for emulation. He challenges social theorists, such as Clifford Geertz,



to re-think their theory of primordialism and the notion that Africa is afflicted with primordial conflicts, which, in the case of Yorubaland, he thinks cannot be theoretically sustained.

In a lucid and comprehensive article, David Laitin<sup>23</sup> also studies the rise and fall of the Yoruba state of the same period. The rise of British hegemony should have meant a decline in freedom of trade for the Africans. But, in contrast to what widely held theories would predict, Laitin observes that the Yoruba state was strengthened through greater exposure to international commerce. Its trades were able to penetrate international markets even during periods of economic crisis with considerable success. In light of these findings, he suggests that some conventional theories be reformulated.

For Robert Fatton,<sup>24</sup> hegemony requires the "expansion" of the state whereby potential allies and even antagonistic elements are gradually absorbed into the institutions of the state. Having studied Senegalese political history from 1975 to 1985, he concludes that while "facing a systematic crisis, the Senegalese ruling class has sought to establish its hegemony through a passive revolution (revolution from above)—rooted in democratization rather than repression." In this case, he meant the legalization of three political parties representing the right, the left and the center.

In the same way, Robert Fatton<sup>25</sup> studied present-day South Africa. He defines ideologies as symbolically changed beliefs and expressions that present, interpret, and evaluate the world in a way that is designed to shape, mobilize, direct, and justify certain courses of action. Having examined how *Black Consciousness* emerged in South Africa as an ideological resistance to white supremacy, he concludes that because the apartheid regime had discovered that dominion had exorbitant costs militarily, politically, and economically, it had to seek other means of ruling through hegemony, for example, *Bantustanization*.

Finally, David Robinson<sup>26</sup> takes up the debate to which Africanists have given attention only recently, that is, the extension of hegemony, which accompanied European domination. For him, whether French hegemony or domination exists, for instance, in present day Senegal, it has to be traced back to the period of 1850 to 1920. He invites others to do likewise with similar situations. In this respect, Robinson pays tribute to the scholarship of David Laitin. He argues that any attempt to study the relevance of Gramsci's theory merely to the post colonial Africa is unrealistic. There must also be a corresponding effort to the study of the colonial era.

## ***The Application of Gramsci's Theory to Africa***

The question raised by Robinson is very pertinent. However, more questions will be raised, not because there are answers to them, but in the hope that they could stimulate more discussion and encourage more research. Before any attempt to consider Gramsci's relevance or irrelevance to Africa, let us therefore begin with a brief survey of Africa's conditions.

Africa remains, by any standard, the least developing continent. It contains most of the least developed countries of the world. The continent has the lowest gross domestic product, the lowest net capital formation, the fewest doctors, and the highest rates of illiteracy. Most African countries are unable to feed their populations. Where surplus of any commodity is to be found, it is a formidable problem to get it where it is needed because the transport linkages are weak. Unemployment in urban areas has also reached unacceptable levels.<sup>27</sup>

Marx's theory of the base and the superstructure can be utilized to the study of any African society. In a continent that is largely agrarian, how useful and relevant is his theory of a proletarian revolution to Africa, in view of what has been reviewed? Moreover, if as Richard Sklar argues, class relations in Africa are not determined by the control of the means of production, but by relations of power. Power, which is the ability to influence, has several dimensions: technological, political, economic, financial, military, intellectual, moral and spiritual, and even aesthetic, and which are not necessarily rooted in the base. They can also be in the superstructure. Gramsci, like Marx, was not concerned with the application of his theory to non-European and colonial situations. Apart from the difficulty of unraveling the meaning of his ideas from the *Prison Notebooks* and drawing a consistent theory from them, his interest in the peasantry has prompted no detailed study devoted exclusively to it. Yet, his views about the revolutionary potential of the peasantry have gained considerable sympathy among social theorists and historians. In that case, shall anybody study Gramsci without Marx? But then, what is Gramsci without Marx?

To make matters worse, Africa is so vast, different and complex that it does not lend itself into any simple categorization. The conventional view is that the African continent is a cultural sub-systems where diverse, language, religion, kinship and occupation are categories that divide different sub-sets of a single society, and that only a handful of established African states are culturally homogeneous.

In many cases the cleavages of cultural pluralism are more apparent than class divisions, and that ethnic or religious identifications have the capacity to generate intense emotional commitments.<sup>28</sup> In light of the findings of David Laitin in Yorubaland, and the challenge he has issued to primordial theorists like

Geertz to rethink and to reformulate their theories, how shall we reconcile the conventional view with that of Laitin?

Even if we were conventionalists, at what level could we study the application of Gramsci's theory of hegemony and domination relative to clan, tribal or national dimensions? What is the relevance of what Gramsci calls the ideological subordination of the working class to the bourgeois in the African context? There is no African national bourgeois. In fact, the role played by the European bourgeois of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the area of capital accumulation and industrialization is being performed in Africa today by the state. Besides, in conditions where dualism and uneven development prevail, and where cultural and economic integration do not exist vertically and horizontally, how much domination and hegemony be exercised by the state? How much influence do foreign powers, businessmen, and missionaries exercise in today's Africa? To what extent could one ignore the colonial era and its legacy, and try to study the hegemony and domination of the contemporary African state, as Robert Fatton has attempted to do with regard Senegal? Today's problems have their origin in the past. It is only by understanding the past that one can understand the present. It is therefore misleading to attempt a single analytical explanation, or to use stereotyped models that have no theoretical insight. A critical study of Senegal's history would have enabled us to understand its past and to offer a better vantage point from which to view its present.

Fatton's study of South Africa, too, is equally misleading. South Africa is a more structured and established state than Senegal, where Gramsci's theory of hegemony and domination could be more appropriate. His book traces the history of black resistance to white domination and tries to explain how *Black Consciousness* evolved as a direct response to white domination. Such consciousness as may exist, we are told, dismisses the peasantry as reactionary, the petite bourgeois as co-opted collaborators, white liberals as patronizing, and foreign investment as a plague.

The fact that the Russian, Chinese, and Vietnamese revolutions did not dismiss the peasantry. If anything, they succeeded because of them. Foreign investment brings with it capital, the know how, skills, and new management techniques, and in the process, it assists the transformation of society. The petite bourgeois too has a role to play. As Leon Trotsky correctly viewed it, the transition of society from one mode of production into another mode of production that is higher, is not done mechanically. Progressive social strata should be there to lead. The absence of such a strata has often meant either stagnation or complete disintegration.

The study has also other serious flaws. Several examples will serve to illustrate the point. First, it emphasizes form at the expense of content. The stress is on the

superstructure. There is very little consideration of the base. One would learn little about agriculture, industry, manufacturing, and services to realize how black Africans were being dominated and exploited by the white establishment. Supposing there was a change at the level of the superstructure, would that also lead to a corresponding change at the base? Fatton argues that foreign investment contributed to the maintenance of the system, but he does not tell us how its termination, or removal, would have necessarily reversed the situation. Moreover, he claims that because the regime had discovered that domination had exorbitant costs, economically and militarily, it resorted to forging new means of hegemony, such as *Bantustanization*, and the employing of 12,000 blacks in the army. However, the defence costs he provides do not prove his point. According to him, military spending had increased from R 472 million to R 2 billion in 1977. The book was published in 1986. The figures provided are for 1977. There is an information gap. Under such circumstances, one cannot determine if hegemony or domination was on the ascendance. The regime was dominant because its very survival depended on crude repression. In this vein, Fatton has failed to convince his readers on both counts.

Within the available space that time permits, an attempt was made to review the limited literature that exists, and the theoretical issues that have preoccupied historians and social theorists who operate within the framework of Gramsci's thinking. As we have also seen, there are differences in approach and in interpretation. The debate has just started in the form of what one may call "shadow boxing," but it does have the potential to become fully blown. As far as Africa is concerned, one cannot claim for the formulations of an unassailable universality and self-sufficiency. As indicated in the review, is it only David Laitin who has given sufficient attention to the establishment of hegemony and domination in the colonial era, and linked their extension to the post colonial era. Others like Fatton (in the case of Senegal and South Africa) have simply ignored the past. Such an approach makes the analysis inadequate and superficial. At the very least, and at a general theoretical level, the cultural, political, ideological and economic dimensions of hegemony and domination should provide the following:

- a. Consideration of how the theories might be applied to specific African conditions, or whether they require a significant modification.
- b. A Critical understanding and analysis of the situation before and during the colonial era.
- c. A correct appraisal of the extension of hegemony and domination to the post colonial period.

Basic to the use of Gramsci's theory as a tool in studying African states is the concept of sovereignty. Its validity rests on the premise that the state is independent

of the dictation of any other authority. The notion of full independence in an independent world is a political and historical fiction. However, since hegemony and domination contravene the premise of autonomy, this serviceable fiction would have to be maintained. Hence, our starting point will have to be the colonial era. It was an era in which external hegemony and domination was deepened. The corpus of state theory itself was derived from Europe and was diffused to Africa through imperial imposition. Even the notion of the nation-state was mediated through the intrusive erection of the colonial state. Its bureaucratic apparatus—parties, parliaments, executives, ministries, and so on, the upholding of hegemony by the state over the territory it rules, the exercise of coercion considered as legitimate means, judicial concepts of state organization—of course stripped of their representational and constitutional aspects—all were derived from the European model.

Moreover, given the self-serving narcissist ideology of “manifest destiny,” and the racist slur that African cultures were without redeeming values, it was felt that the uplifting of the African from his “barbarism” and “savagery” could be accomplished only through acceptance of the European culture. As a result, all socializing mechanisms, including language, religion, education, ideology, law, mass media, trade unions, and so on, became European in form and content. Even the modern instruments of repression and domination—the army and the security apparatus—were introduced by the colonial power. If this takes care of the superstructure, let us also look at the base.

During the colonial era, previously isolated communities were drawn into the world economy. the commercialization of peasant agriculture, the imposition of the plantation economy, the establishment of the service industry, mining, some manufacturing, and the financing of trade by the creation of a single multilateral system of international payments, with all the consequences of uneven development and dependence, took root during the colonial era—a historical fact from which Africa still suffers, and which has only resulted in creating a pattern of dependency.

Even when decolonization came, it was more of a negotiated settlement than anything else. The African states began to hoist national flags, sing national anthems, and vote at the United Nations. Even the bureaucracy was Africanized, but beyond that, little has changed. The African states are theoretically independent, but in reality they are dependent on European and American hegemony and domination. To argue that Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and domination is applicable to Africa is but to state the obvious. To confine oneself to the post colonial era, and to ignore the historical period in which European



powers established their domination and hegemony, whose consequences are still being deeply felt, as some Africanists have attempted to do, is to be wholly mechanical and unscientific.

## Conclusion

The first problem for Africanists is to respond to the challenges issued by Laitin, who argues that conventional theories about Africa are reformulated. Once this is properly addressed, the tasks of an initial critique to the relevance of Gramsci's theory to Africa should focus on what is at fault with the theory itself. In this case, and equally important is to seriously consider Adamson's pertinent observation regarding what he calls Gramsci's failure to see anything between coercion and consent. This may require a fundamental restructuring of the theory itself.

It may be difficult to separate Gramsci from Marx. However, it should be recognized that some of Marx's assumptions are totally irrelevant to Africa—the more so, if, as Richard Sklar argues, class relations in Africa are determined not by the ownership of the means of production, but by the ability to control the means of compulsion. The eagerness to employ the precepts of a theory without awareness of its implications can only be dangerous. Furthermore, since Gramsci feels that in less developed societies, where the level of consciousness is low and where people are ruled by apathy and fear, a coup d'état of the Russian type may be appropriate. Since the gun determines class domination, some African regimes that called themselves revolutionaries and Marxists, but who were an anti-thesis to everything he espoused, had been installed. Would Gramsci approve of them? The fact that the hegemony and domination, which existed during the colonial era has been extended to the present day cannot be disputed. However, there is the need to integrate both phases and to examine the validity of Robinson's theory of collaboration. Failing that, the models employed cannot be considered as conceptual responses to empirically established research, but as forcing African conditions to fit the models. It seems, indeed, that a more analytical investigation remains to be done.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Since at least the 1970s, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is being considered as one of the most important Marxist theorists since Marx. His ideas were written in Italian prisons in elliptical and allusive style so as to escape the censors. Thereafter, they were compiled and published under the title, *Prison Notebooks*.

<sup>2</sup> In this context, Gramsci meant the mechanisms of socialization such as the church, mass media, and the trade unions.

<sup>3</sup> See Talcott Parsons, "Some Reflections on the Place of Force in Social Processes," in Harry Eckstein, ed. *Internal War* (New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp.33-70.

<sup>4</sup> See his preface to a *Critique of Political Economy*, 1859.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Marx, "The German Ideology," in Robert C. Tucker, ed. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York, W.W.Norton, 1972, p.3

<sup>6</sup> Consciousness, it is said, is determined by one's place in the means of production. False consciousness is not an error of fact, but of reasoning and perception.

<sup>7</sup> See the selections from the *Political Writings of Antonio Gramsci (1910-1920)*, ed. Quintin Hoare, International Publishers, New York, 1977, P. 3

<sup>8</sup> Salamini Leonardo: Gramsci and the Marxist Sociology of Knowledge, *Sociological Quarterly*, 1984, 15(3): 359-380.

<sup>9</sup> It is supposed to be an assault on cultural and ideological hegemony.

<sup>10</sup> Femia, J.V.: *Gramsci's Political Thought*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Bates, Thomas: "Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1975, 36 (2):351-366

<sup>12</sup> IBID, Salamini.

<sup>13</sup> Scott, James, "Hegemony and the Peasantry," *Politics and Society*, 1977, 7 (3):267-296.

<sup>14</sup> Adamson, Walter, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980.

<sup>15</sup> SKLAR, Richard, "The Nature of Class Domination in Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, E.B. 1979, 17 (4):531-552.

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